

University of Alberta College Model Review (18 months)

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This is the final report of the **18-month review** of the administrative and leadership structure of the College Model at the University of Alberta that was formally launched on July 1, 2021.

Background

On December 11, 2020, the Board of Governors (BOG) approved a new academic structure, called the College Model, for the University of Alberta. The Model created three Colleges - Health Sciences, Natural and Applied Sciences, and Social Sciences and Humanities - into which 13 of the University's Faculties were grouped. Augustana, CSJ, and the Faculty of Native Studies remained as stand-alone Faculties.

The BOG's motion included a provision that the Colleges would be implemented by a College Dean seconded from the existing deans within the respective College, and that after 18 months, the President would undertake a review of the College administrative and leadership structure and report to the BOG and GFC.

The Colleges were launched on July 1, 2021, and an initial version of the operating model was released in June, 2021. The operating model identified authority and responsibilities of different layers of the institution in the new College Model. Following establishment of the College Offices of Education and Research, and appointment of Associate Deans in the Colleges, the operating model was revised and re-released in fall, 2022, along with the University of Alberta for Tomorrow: One University document.

I was asked, through reviewing materials and interviewing key stakeholders, to evaluate and make recommendations on the College administrative and leadership structure, and specifically to respond to four questions:

1. How do the Colleges support the success of the university in building a team-based culture, promoting innovation, increasing interdisciplinary collaborations (research and teaching), and finding efficiencies?
2. What do we need to do for the College Model to propagate UA to be in the top 3 in Canada and in the top 50 in the world?
3. What opportunities would you recommend as the Colleges evolve and mature with time? What early opportunities are there for successes that will lead to further success?
4. How do you recommend that the University measure success as the initiative moves forward?

Questions 1 and 3 have been answered through a discussion on the early successes that have occurred to date, and potential opportunities that exist with the College Model. Early obstacles to success have

also been identified – these will need to be managed expeditiously for future success to occur. Questions 2 and 4 are answered directly towards the end of this report. Recommendations are made throughout the document and then summarized in Appendix A.

I was provided in advance with the One University document and the Operating Model for the Colleges and several College Metric reports. During visits to the University of Alberta, copies of GFC and BOG minutes related to the formation of the College Model, and academic restructuring background information were obtained.

Thirty-four in-person interviews (N=61 people) occurred during November 21-23, 2022, and January 23-25, 2023, in Edmonton with leaders at all levels, including Faculties, Colleges, and the University, members of GFC, and a group from Chairs Council Executive. Some interviews were conducted individually, while others occurred in a small group format. To respond to the above questions, 16-20 probing questions were created to help guide conversations with interviewees. Interviews lasted between 45 to 120 minutes. The conversations in these interviews were engaging, passionate, and constructive.

The comments below represent a synopsis of information gleaned from interviews.

General Observations:

Context

In the context of significant budget cuts from the provincial government, COVID, and the shift in leadership in critical positions across campus, a major restructuring took place at the University. This restructuring involved both the administrative (Service Excellence Transformation - SET) and academic (College Model) sides of the house, and was necessitated because the previous structure was siloed, inefficient, and provided little way for the university to move forward. The presidential and all vice-presidential offices also underwent major restructuring. The financial challenges that resulted from deep budget cuts provided an opportunity, but also necessity, for both administrative and academic transformation. The restructuring that occurred was monumental – and change occurred rapidly. The academic transformation is unique in Canada and has high potential to move the university forward. The restructuring has not been without issue, but given the size, scope, necessary speed, and context within which it was done, the current state speaks to the resilience of the people at the University of Alberta.

Further, within this context of rapid change, while the College Model was officially launched on July 1, 2021, it took approximately one year to stand up the College offices, and interim College Deans were in place for the entirety of the 18-month review period. College Deans were in the process of being hired during the production of this report. The three Colleges are all different, and people generally agreed this was a good thing. However, the Colleges are not currently operating at the same level. The arc and pace of change in each College is different, depending on issues, culture, readiness to change and scope. A period of consolidation is required for some changes before the full value of the College Model is realized and prior to rushing to judgement on the success of the Model. Given the short 18-month period for this review, and the immense amount of change taking place on campus, this review should be seen as a forward-looking document.

In the process of doing this review, it was apparent that academic transformation was required at the University of Alberta. In the context of funding cuts and the inefficiencies that existed, as well as opportunity costs related to the previous siloed structure (e.g., lack of large research project success; inability to respond to various levels of the government in a timely matter on a myriad of issues), several models were examined. These models included amalgamation of Faculties, which was quickly deemed to be politically unpalatable on campus. The College Model was seen as having the potential to break down Faculty silos while maintaining individual Faculty identity. It was eventually approved by both GFC and the Board, although the Board did make a key change to the proposal that came through GFC related to leadership of the College. Regardless of how this model came about – it does exist on campus now – and there is no alternative to return to status quo. Some have suggested that much of the rationale for the College Model was unnecessary and that much of what was being touted as part of the Colleges could be done without the model in place. For example, there was some interdisciplinary collaboration on campus for large grants, and there were pockets of interdisciplinary teaching. While that is true for some areas of the campus, it should be recognized that UA has been less successful in major grant competitions than should be expected for an institution of this size and scope, and there have been missed opportunities for responses from provincial government calls – in both teaching and research. There is tremendous opportunity for the UA with the College Model – but the success of the model will depend on the buy-in from the institution writ large.

Early Successes

Despite the contracted review period, there have been success stories and the start of the formation of a team-based culture, particularly within leadership layers of the academy. Power is more distributed amongst academic leaders in this model and allows for greater focus on key strategic thrusts (e.g., EDI, reconciliation efforts). Many saw the model as being more effective, efficient, nimble, and collegial. Leaders at all levels are talking to each other more and are learning from one another. The varying levels of leadership positions creates more opportunities for succession planning. The start of this new leadership culture now needs to move outwards into the academy.

In addition to the restructuring associated with the College Model, the presidential and every vice-presidential office underwent significant restructuring. The Provost's Office structure is unique in Canada, has more distributed power, and allows for more rapid decision making. It has changed the reporting structure for Faculty Deans within Colleges, who now report to a College Dean directly. However, all Deans can access the provost directly. This office structure works well with the current Provost, who has brought renewed energy and support for the College Model, along with positive messaging that has generally been well received. Faculty Deans in general who now report to a College Dean had few issues with this reporting structure because the current Provost is responsive to all Deans. This will be an important consideration in the selection of future Provosts. The VPRI office went from a tri-council model to a more strategic structure (i.e., four Centres of Expertise – Research and Development Services; Partnerships, Innovation and Knowledge Mobilization; Strategic Research Initiatives and Performance; Research Integrity Support), supported by a Research Partners Network. New processes were put in place for large grants. Work continues with the VPRI, College Deans and Faculty Deans to ensure research potential is realized on campus. The VPER team was also totally restructured and is much more efficient and coordinated in terms of strategizing donor requests, events,

and communications. Similar significant restructuring also occurred in Facilities and Operations and Finance and Administration.

Offices for all Colleges include a leadership team that consists of an interim Vice Provost/College Dean, Associate Deans for Research and Education, and a General Manager. These individuals are exceptional and passionate ambassadors for the University of Alberta. Each of the groups are meeting regularly and learning from each other. The Vice Provosts/College Deans are seen as an extension of the Provost and as a way to amplify messages – and an important critical leadership layer of the academy. Each has developed robust forums like the College Council of Deans to determine synergies and opportunities. Most felt these meetings were invaluable, with opportunities to share and evaluate ideas, and approach partners with a single voice. Each College is identifying academic administrative processes that are critical to the academic mission that could be moved to the College level, allowing for further efficiencies, nimbleness, and strategic responses to critical calls from government and other partners. It is important to note that while academic administrative processes and work moves to the College level, key academic decisions remain within Faculties. There has been some resistance in Faculties to letting go of some processes, and while progress varies between Colleges, it is being made, with some of this consolidation work including processes around academic integrity and discipline, course scheduling and timetabling, student systems mapping with institutional systems, and academic program coordination and administration. There has also been coordination on some strategic priorities, including enrolment expansion, recruitment, strategic cluster hires, online and continuing education strategies, space and capital planning, and work integrated learning. College offices are also examining the coordination of operational processes with Centres of Expertise – whether with Shared Services, Finance, HR, and/or the VPRI, and are coordinating efforts to simplify and improve undergraduate and graduate processes with UA International, the Registrar's Office and FGSR. Further, the Colleges are providing a unique opportunity for key institutional strategic thrusts. For example, from an Indigenous and reconciliation perspective, the infrastructure does not exist for Elders to be associated with every Faculty – but it is being developed to work with each College. Additionally, some Colleges are working on unique initiatives and partnerships specific to their disciplinary and interdisciplinary expertise, in both research and education.

Interactions between Faculty Deans within Colleges has improved and is serving as a built-in support system for Deans. Deans are meeting more regularly and sharing best practices. Deans of Stand-Alone Faculties generally feel more supported than previously, and their Faculties are having more of a presence centrally. Chairs see more diversity in the types of leaders that are in the academy, and they have a possibility to have more than one mentor – so again, the College Model is seen as valuable in leadership succession planning.

The new structure has allowed the institution to be more strategic in communications and marketing, and early results are showing higher impact, particularly in issues management. Media training is also being done everyday, and new media stories are being pitched daily – which has the potential to see greater impact in the future.

For capital planning and general space planning and more specifically research space planning, there is opportunity to plan at a more strategic level, allowing for better and more appropriate use of limited resources.

Recommendations:

- 1. Team-based culture:** *A team-based and collaborative culture has developed within the senior leadership structure of the university, and it needs to be carefully tended. There are many excellent role models in the senior team. Deans should deliberately and intentionally work on developing this type of culture with their department heads and administrative leaders in their faculties. Along with this new culture there should be a recognition that the academic mission, i.e., teaching and research, are not zero-sum games – when people work together and there is success, everyone benefits, including those not directly involved.*
- 2. Efficiencies – Academic Processes:** *All Colleges, in conjunction with their reporting Faculties, should continue to identify academic processes that can be moved to the College level. Process mapping should occur in advance, to ensure that academic decision making remains at the Faculty level. Best practices in creating these types of efficiencies should be shared between and within Colleges. Given the College Model, governance pathways should be established to approve new programs in a timely fashion.*
- 3. Efficiencies – Operational Processes:** *The coordination by Colleges of operational processes with Centres of Expertise (i.e., Shared Services, Finance, HR, VPRI) should continue to be expanded. Process mapping should occur in advance to ensure efficiencies are realized. A service culture should be encouraged and developed.*

NOTE: *these efficiency changes should not be viewed as centralization of services, but rather standardization of services.*

- 4. Strategic Priorities:** *Where possible, connections should continue to be made by Faculties within a College on strategic priorities. This will allow for innovation and should result in interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches. Strategic priorities should not just involve processes like enrolment and recruitment but should move into areas of research and education. Vice Provosts/College Deans and Associate Deans should eventually work together to identify collaborative opportunities between Colleges.*

Potential Opportunities

In addition to the early successes already identified, there were several potential opportunities related to the College Model, which were unsurprisingly not yet fully realized. Generally, many saw this model as a big opportunity – some described it as a watershed moment for the university. It is potentially transformative if it does contribute to enhancing research, teaching, and service. But the university is large and complex and there is not a collective understanding of the College Model. Historical structures are deeply held, and it will take some time for the new structures to take hold.

The College Model provides a scaffolding structure to do collaborative work on several fronts. People identified that separate units were talking with one another and starting to collaborate on issues. Many believed that silos are and will continue to be decreased through the College Associate Dean roles. There was also general agreement that there was an increase in economies of scale for academic administrative services at the College level, but that more front-end work on process mapping needed to occur.

Almost everyone agreed that there was huge research potential, particularly around large project ideation, partnership grants, and coordination within and between Colleges and stand-alone Faculties. This will involve increased leadership and coordination from the VPRI office, as noted in the recent large grant competitions, and more interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration, and will allow UA to compete for these grants in a way they have not been competing before. There are big opportunities in some key areas, examples which include but are not limited to major health challenges, Indigenous health, quantum, sustainability, and AI. In addition to larger projects, many agreed that there was more engagement and interest in building research capacity more generally. Further, there has been provision of research supports that were not available in smaller Faculties. Deans of Stand-Alone Faculties suggested there was more room for collaboration and an opportunity to showcase what their Faculties could contribute. Other Faculties were not always sure how to include the stand-alone Faculties in initiatives. Most agreed that communication lines about research and research partnerships have been opened – this is due both to conversations at the College level and the changes within the VPRI portfolio.

There were also terrific opportunities identified in teaching and learning. These ranged from streamlining programs and eliminating duplication, to the development of innovative programs and micro-credentials that could be shared between groups and interprofessional courses, particularly in the health sciences area. Some suggested that educational technology could be tested within a College and transferred for use more broadly on campus. People also identified many opportunities for collaborative programs and teaching between Faculties and Colleges, which have the potential to attract new students. This could involve cross-Faculty appointments. Other opportunities included increased study abroad, international partnership agreements, and international collaborative programs. Opportunities identified for graduate education included interprofessional courses for graduate students, collaborative course-based and professional masters degree programs, and streamlined graduate student administration and support.

People also believed student experience would be enhanced with the College Model, with standardization and consistency of student services, including, for example, academic scheduling, academic integrity regulations, transfers, and teaching and learning initiatives. The College Offices of Education are working through timetabling issues that should result in tangible change in the student experience. Another longer-term opportunity is that of clinical placements – if managed at the College level, processes could be streamlined and standardized for students, and community and government partners would have a single point of contact to the institution, rather than multiple points, which will help to enhance reputation.

Several forward-looking opportunities were also identified in the external relations area, including strategic prioritization of government relations and donor relations, and continued issues management at both the College and institutional level (which will help to impact reputation).

Governance processes could also be streamlined, in particular calendaring of meetings, with agendas being driven by strategy.

Faculty members have generally not seen “wins” because of the College Model, but this is because it is too early in the process. It will be important to identify the value proposition for faculty members and amplify success stories.

Recommendation:

- 5. **University Research and ties to Tri-Council Agencies:** While the College Model should lead to an increase in interdisciplinary, partnership, and large collaborative grants, there should be continued attention paid to standard disciplinary grants.*

Early Obstacles

Several issues were raised as obstacles to success. It will be important to address these obstacles in a timely fashion to maximize the potential of and opportunities associated with the College Model. These obstacles are identified below:

Evolving Narrative

The College Model has been hurt by the **lack of a consistent narrative**, or rather an **evolving narrative**, on the rationale for such a change. This has resulted in skepticism and confusion on campus. When asked about the rationale for the change to the College Model, responses ranged from:

- budget/cost savings
- decreasing the number of direct reports in the provost’s office – needing to make the provost’s job more manageable
- breaking down the deeply siloed structure that existed with distributed, autonomous, and independent Faculties and units that resulted in slow, inefficient and non-strategic decision-making at the institutional level
- decision making also lacked transparency which created suspicion and led to a lack of trust
- the siloed structure resulted in a loss of opportunities that required people to work together including interdisciplinary teaching and research opportunities (e.g., large partnership and team-based grants)
- to increase interdisciplinary initiatives – in both teaching and research
- to increase central control; to aid in strategic planning from the center; to control deans not doing their jobs
- university reputation was starting to be impacted with the old structure
- there was not a common University of Alberta student experience between and sometimes within Faculties
- there was a desire to be more nimble, innovative, responsive and have more impactful community engagement, which required more coordination on a bigger scale

Many or all of the above reasons may have been part of the rationale. Communication on the College Model has been voluminous and in multiple modalities, but messages were not clear, inconsistent, and not stated in a cohesive manner. And - it has been impossible to capture attention between COVID and SET. There is suggestion that people on the ground have no real knowledge or understanding of what has happened and as a result they see the College Model as being transactional, not visionary. Some described the communication as poor storytelling, with the wrong people (i.e., only leaders) telling the story. More exemplars, using people on the ground, are needed in storytelling. It is important that people understand the why before they can move on to the how.

Recommendation:

- 6. Communication:** *Communication and the narrative about the College Model needs to be consistent, cohesive, and authentic and should include a solid rationale for the adoption of the Model, including many of the reasons noted above. There is a great story to tell in the changes that have been made. Exemplars of early successes need to be identified and amplified so that possibilities and potential for the new structure are recognized across campus. Regular communication, particular to staff and faculty, is important and needs to be coordinated across the university. Consider spokespeople outside of the leadership structure, so that people across the campus can see themselves and how they may be positively impacted.*

Value Proposition of the College Model

In addition to an evolving narrative, the **value proposition** of the College Model is not well understood on campus. It seems, for example, that you could do interdisciplinary work before, and now Faculties have fewer reports and are providing less service. To some the Colleges seems like an additional layer of administration, which is likely to cost more money and make the university more bureaucratic. To others the Colleges are about academic administrative restructuring – that should allow for more standardization of service for students and staff, increasing effectiveness and efficiency. Some further suggested that each College should have a specific and unique value proposition. Some suggested that the College Model made the university less legible to the external community, while others argued it was easier for community members, with fewer points of contact or entry to different areas of campus. Almost all agreed that Colleges should be complementary and value-add to Faculties, not duplicative.

The lack of clarity in the value proposition and the evolving narrative around the Colleges has led to some worrying perceptions:

- that this is a temporary model that most can “wait out”
- that this model is about decreasing the number of departments on campus
- that this model is a slow way to amalgamate Faculties
- some concern that some Faculties have been downgraded because the Dean reports to a College Dean and not directly to the Provost

Clarity and transparency in the value proposition of each College will be important moving forward.

Recommendations:

- 7. Value Add:** *The value proposition for the College Model should be clearly identified for all members of the University of Alberta – and specific strategies and metrics should be identified,*

implemented, measured and reported upon to ensure that the additional value of moving to this model is realized.

- 8. Perception vs Reality and the Importance of Authentic Communication:** *The perceptions identified in the “Value Proposition of the College Model” section need to be addressed with authentic, honest communication. This is not a model that people can “wait out” since many reasons for the model still exist and the return to status quo is not an option. Nothing in any written material or in discussion with senior leaders pointed to decreasing departments or amalgamation of Faculties – but if this is in planning, it should be communicated directly.*

- 9. Reporting of Faculty Deans:** *Vice Provosts/College Deans must be seen as an extension of the Provost, with the authority of the Provost behind them, rather than as another type of Dean, particularly since Colleges are not academic units. Consideration could be given to renaming this position Vice Provost College (and Associate Deans of the College as Associate Vice Provosts College). This would help with the external perception of the reporting lines. This is a unique structure in Canada, but frankly one that is long overdue. The role of the Provost has become almost unmanageable in Canadian institutions, and the University of Alberta is to be commended for the courage demonstrated with the restructure of the Provost’s Office. It is difficult to be first – and if successful, many are likely to follow with restructures of their own. It also should be noted that this is an excellent example of “power to”, rather than “power over”, which speaks volumes about the current leadership at the University.*

Conflation of SET with College Model

Two major restructures happened at the same time – the administrative side of the house through SET and an academic restructuring through the College Model. These processes have unfortunately been conflated, for a number of reasons: the same consultant firm, NOUS, was hired to advise on both processes, and so there is a perception the processes are related and part of a secret agenda; some of the partners from the SET process are situated within College offices – so they are seen as part of the College Model, and not from SET; there is a common link between the two processes – pulling things from the Faculties/Units and centralizing them (or rather standardizing them); and the speed with which both processes occurred did not allow for separation between them. Currently, SET is viewed negatively in the academy because service levels are not where they should be (repeated examples included a 6-month period to get approval for a hiring process and inordinate amount of time to pay graduate students). There was a perception that the partner networks were resistant to commit to resources for a College because they are unavailable – many suggested the partner networks (i.e., HR, finance, IT) are seen as the new silos. Some suggested there was a cumbersome system to begin with, and it has been made more cumbersome through SET. With over 800 people lost through the SET process, historical institutional knowledge was lost, which has left a void with some processes. Continued process mapping will be important to ensure efficiencies in the future. Further, faculty service providers that remain feel vulnerable, and are still looking for clarification about their roles. A problematic issue raised was that some people in key positions within the SET process did not understand the academy, or the role of the academy within the university. People did recognize that it was early in the process, but they are frustrated and impatient, even though they are starting to see some improvements in service. The negative perception of SET has unfortunately impacted perceptions of the College Model.

Both SET and the College Model processes were implemented on a rapid timeline, driven by external factors like the budget cuts. It is unusual to do both major restructures at the same time, and most would agree not ideal. While SET happened quickly because of the budget cuts, it was also supported by Uniforum data, which demonstrated that administrative costs at University of Alberta were the most expensive in the global benchmarking exercise of post-secondary institutions. The changes made have resulted in the university being tied with the lowest costs in Canada for those participating in Uniforum data collection. The university is now in an important 1–2-year consolidation period to ensure service levels are where they are needed. The College Model evolved more slowly in the first twelve months but saw rapid acceleration when the interim provost was appointed. Given this time frame, the successes associated with the College Model cited earlier are quite remarkable.

Recommendations:

- 10. Consolidation:** *Time for consolidation of both restructures (SET and the College Model), while attending to critical feedback, is important. Continued regular metrics for the SET restructuring should be collected and reported on, including service times for key processes within the academy. Where response times are still high, immediate action should be undertaken to address issues. Updates should be provided on each College regularly, so that progress can be mapped. Another review of the College Model should be completed in 18-24 months to determine whether consolidation has occurred, and benefits of the Model are seen in the academy.*

- 11. Business of the University:** *It is important that everyone at the university understand that the business of the university is the academy writ large (i.e., teaching and learning). It is not finance, HR, risk management, facilities, or other issues-based portfolios. All of these portfolios are important for the efficient and effective running of the university and provide critical support for the academic mission – and they must be balanced with the operations and needs of the academy. Education in some critical support positions and portfolios is required.*

Budget

Expectations for Colleges are very high, and generally people felt that Colleges had been under-resourced. The original budget model for Colleges was to levy constituent Faculties, and there is a perception that this levy was inequitably applied, which is not helping the overall perception of the Colleges. The new budget model was not out at the time of writing and that has also hurt the transition to the new model.

Recommendation:

- 12. Budget Model for Colleges:** *Rather than tax/levy faculties to create the budget for each college, consider a base transfer from Faculties to establish each College budget. The “tax” was interpreted by many, particularly smaller faculties, to be unfair. Develop a more transparent process for determining the basis for the base transfer. Further, develop a flexible fund to be used at the Provost’s discretion, to ensure the University is able to capitalize on opportunities that occur within year.*

Culture

The College Model will meet success or failure based on culture or organizational coherence – but the development of culture seems to have been left to chance. A more open, team-based, collaborative culture has developed amongst leaders in the institution (from Deans up), but more work is required for a deliberate and intentional bottom-up approach. Some suggested the College Model has changed nothing for academic staff and has created confusion. Because of the significant transformation that has occurred it was suggested many were still fearful of losing jobs and that there was a clash of cultures between Faculties and the Colleges. This, along with being asked to do more with less and a growing trust gap between central administration, the Board, and the academy related to a general feeling of not being heard or valued, a perception of lack of respect for the academy, and a perceived lack of transparency in communication and process, has created a morale issue that has impacted culture. This has led to disengagement of many academics (as an aside, disengagement is also in line with literature related to the impact of COVID – many have argued that COVID has exacerbated pre-existing issues in the academy). Regardless of the reasons, withdrawal and general disengagement were perceived as obstacles to the development of a new culture. A more dire situation would result in retention and recruitment issues for the university, which would significantly impact reputation.

An institution the size of the University of Alberta will have several cultures (e.g., departmental, Faculty, institutional, student, alumni) – and that is positive if various cultures are able to work together for common good and in the strategic goals of the university. Several mentioned that there was a lack of a service-oriented culture in the institution, and that with SET it had turned to more of a “gatekeeper” culture. Many agreed that the institution needed a more service-oriented, “gateway” culture in both SET and the College Model.

Recommendations:

13. Culture: *Culture does not happen by accident – deliberate and intentional action needs to be taken to shape positive culture. As an important first step, an employee engagement survey (EES) should be conducted to establish a baseline. Senior leaders should identify critical action steps from the results of the EES and commit to action. Individual units should receive their specific results and be held accountable for developing and implementing plans to address critical issues. The EES should be repeated on a 2-to-3-year cycle to determine whether forward progress is being made.*

14. Trust Gap: *Re-building trust within the faculty and staff will be an important piece of building a positive culture. This will take time, but will involve active listening, authentic consultation (i.e., that feedback provided in a consultation has a legitimate chance to be incorporated into a proposal going through governance, while recognizing that choices must be made on opposing points of view), and action when action has been promised. Issues also must be acknowledged before action can be taken.*

People need to feel valued for the work they are doing. The development of local, Faculty, College, and University-wide recognition programs should be undertaken, allowing for a range of formal recognition opportunities. Leaders should take an active and intentional role in informally recognizing people for the work they are doing.

15. Retention Strategy: *The university should track faculty member departures, and career timing of those departures. If there is a pattern of departures post tenure or just prior to tenure, a retention strategy for mid-career academics should be developed and put in place immediately. The retention strategy currently in place for senior academics should be reviewed and adjusted, if necessary.*

Role clarification/confusion

Role clarification is required in several areas.

There is ongoing confusion about roles of Vice Provost/College Deans and College Associate Deans vis a vis Faculty Deans and Associate Deans. Some thought that even now, the authority of the Vice Provost/College Dean is not clear culturally or organizationally. This has led to duplication of services between the Colleges and Faculties in some instances. There also does not appear to be a clear connection or delineation of responsibilities between the College research offices, the VPRI, and the Faculty research offices. There needs to be clarification of the role of the Colleges in academic program development and approval processes. Clarification is also required around management of educational and research partners – some of whom will be unique to Faculties, others of which will be more interdisciplinary and a better fit at the College level. Because of this role confusion, some are perceiving the College structure as an extra layer of bureaucracy and another barrier to action. It is unsurprising that some of this confusion exists given the monumental amount of change that has occurred, the timing of this review, and in absence of a clear path for decisions, people will want to hold on to the old ways of doing things. To move forward, clarification is required quickly.

In addition to the above, clarification is also required for several units. The FGSR appears to be an afterthought in the College Model. It is not clear where FGSR – and graduate education more generally – fits in the new Model. Will there be connection to academic graduate processes at the College level, with academic work remaining with Faculties and Departments, or will everything remain within Faculties and Departments with FGSR continuing to function as it is now? Graduate education is an important driver of research in a university, and a key indicator for institutional rankings and reputation. It is also not clear how Centres and Institutes fit within the College Model. Some suggested larger Institutes should be profiled at the College level, where they could provide a focus on interdisciplinarity. Others suggested there were too many Institutes and Centres. Careful attention to both FGSR and Centres and Institutes is required. Stand-Alone Faculties do have a direct line to the Provost, which is very positive, but they are not included upfront in College discussions, so at times they feel they are an afterthought in some key strategic discussions. This may be part of the consolidation process that will occur over the next 1-2 years – attention needs to be paid to how Stand-Alone Faculties can interact with Colleges on a proactive basis.

A concern was raised multiple times with respect to research, particularly for SSHRC-related disciplines and where they fit. While Colleges were formed along tri-council lines, the VPRI office now has four Centres of Expertise supported by a Research Partners Network. This is potentially a very exciting overall structure for research on campus, and the structures – both the College Model and the VPRI's office structure - need consolidation time. It is important during this consolidation time for SSHRC researchers to see themselves reflected in the leadership structure within the VPRI's office.

Finally, there seems to be a general lack of understanding between the various roles of GFC, the BOG, and senior administration more generally as it relates to governance. Given the significant change that was made to the leadership structure of the College Model proposal at the BOG, GFC is generally distrusting of processes going to the board now. Many, however, also commented that GFC meetings had been dysfunctional at times. Consultation must also be authentic – people need to feel they have actual input into proposals moving forward, rather than feeling like decisions have already been made.

Recommendations:

- 16. Role Clarification:** *As lessons are learned in the implementation of the College Model, the roles of the Vice Provost/College Dean and the College Associate Deans need to continue to be clarified, particularly relative to the roles of Deans and Associate Deans of Faculties. Further, there needs to be role clarification between the research offices in Faculties and Colleges, and the VPRI office. A singular university document, which was produced in the fall of 2022 that outlined the roles and responsibilities of all leaders within the College Model, should be regularly updated to reflect consolidation as it occurs.*
- 17. Centres and Institutes:** *The role, location, and funding of Centres and Institutes needs to be clarified in the College Model. Consideration should be given to whether some centres and institutes should continue to exist, and whether some, particularly those that are interdisciplinary in nature, should move to the College level.*
- 18. FGSR:** *Given the aspirations and potential growth strategy at the University, the important role of graduate education at UA in relation to the College Model needs to be clarified, as does the role of FGSR.*
- 19. Stand-Alone Faculties:** *College Vice Provosts/Deans should identify ways to involve Stand-Alone Faculties in pro-active discussions, particularly related to teaching and research. This may involve highlighting potential topics of discussion in advance of meetings, allowing Deans of Stand-Alone Faculties the choice to attend.*
- 20. Governance:** *Clarity in governance, and the roles and responsibilities of various bodies, is critical to the success of a university that relies on collegial governance. The University should consider an external governance review, to help with transparency, lack of trust, and infighting – but also to align with the College Model. Having an external review would help with any perceptions of a review with a pre-determined outcome.*

Performance Evaluation

Repeatedly and consistently, people mentioned that the incentive structure for academic staff must change to be aligned with the College Model, particularly with a broader definition of scholarship and more recognition for interdisciplinary, collaborative, and community-based scholarship and teaching. While people may be internally motivated to do this type of work, if they are not valued and/or recognized for the work, they are likely to become disengaged and disenchanting. This also means that barriers need to be removed for collaborative, interdisciplinary team teaching and research, including

but not limited to timetabling, workload assignments, consistency in value for workload assignments across Faculties, and cross-appointments. Quality also needs to be valued over quantity, and evaluation should not be based on popularity or bullying.

Recommendation:

21. FEC processes: *Criteria for recognition of scholarship need to be broader and enhanced – with an emphasis on recognizing interdisciplinary, collaborative, community-engaged and team-based teaching, scholarship, and creative activity. This change would help in part in enhancing faculty morale.*

What needs to happen with the College Model to propagate UA to be in the top 3 in Canada and in the top 50 in the world?

Much of the discussion included in this report, and many of the recommendations, identify what needs to be done with the College Model to move the University of Alberta into the top 3 in Canada and top 50 in the world. Additionally, the following should be considered:

Strategically, the University should be willing to make some foundational commitments, while also identifying strengths and articulating priorities. With increasingly shrinking resources, the University cannot continue to be all things to all people. Once priorities are in place, and as the College Model continues to be refined and roles are clarified, the significant convening and leadership role of the Colleges should be recognized, particularly for interdisciplinary, collaborative, and team-based teaching and research initiatives – at both the intra- and inter-College levels.

Rankings are typically based in large part on research success and impact, which is also tied to reputation. Foundational to research success is the talent that is attracted to the University, including students, post doctoral scholars, staff, and faculty members. Around the world, there is increasing competition for talent at all levels. Colleges, in conjunction with the Provost and VPRI, could play a key role in the attraction of talent, from leading the growth strategy for students to the organization of cluster hires in areas of strategic importance. Another key component of research success is the research environment more generally – including policies and procedures, research support for faculty, post docs and grad students, and research facilities. College leaders could work with the VPRI, FGSR, and the Provost to provide the administrative scaffolding structure to enhance research on campus, and with the VP Facilities and Operations to provide the consolidated plan for research facilities, always ensuring efforts are not duplicated. Colleges could also provide a scaffolding framework for commercialization and innovation efforts.

Another key area in rankings is the teaching and learning environment, which is often measured by the quality of graduates (either through reputational surveys or employer surveys). In addition to recruitment and retention strategies for students, academic programs should be current, meaningful, and relevant for students today – and they should provide maximum flexibility. Colleges could focus on ensuring and coordinating clear pathways for the development of interdisciplinary micro-credentials and work-integrated learning experiences. Graduate programming should include professional development,

which could be held at the College level in conjunction with FGSR. Frequently, a surrogate measure for the teaching and learning environment used in rankings is the faculty/student ratio, so careful consideration should be given in the student growth strategy to the type and number of faculty hires required to support the projected growth in students.

Internationalization, or international outlook, is the other component of most ranking exercises. This frequently relates to number of international students, where those students come from, the number of internationally-trained/international faculty members, and the number of international partnerships and collaborations. The University of Alberta has a rich history of international work – and increased focus on this area will again be required to move upwards in the rankings. Colleges could play a key convening role and provide a scaffolding structure for this work.

How should the University measure success as the initiative moves forward?

Generally, metrics for the College Model should be tied to the University strategy and include both qualitative and quantitative indices.

Simply – on the qualitative side, the College Model will be successful when people can see the value add of the College structure, feel valued and recognized for the contributions they are making and are engaged with the university (faculty satisfaction/engagement surveys), and the external community finds it easier to connect into the university. In absence of a completed strategic plan at the time of writing this report, some specific metrics for consideration, based on rationale for the College model would be:

Rankings

- of the university, and individual subject rankings

Talent metrics:

Students

- Student growth (#'s of students – Full-time [FT] and Part-time [PT] in each of undergraduate, graduate, international)
- Student retention (from first to second year and beyond)
- Ratio of undergrad/grad students
- Ratio of faculty/students
- Completion times

Faculty

- Faculty recruitment and retention stats (e.g., diversity of hiring pools; ratio of # of failed searches to successful searches; successful retentions vs loss of individuals)
- # Faculty at various ranks, and growth in those numbers over time
- Ratio of teaching to research staff; ratio of FT to PT academic staff

Staff

- Staff recruitment and retention stats
- Staff/Faculty ratio

Programs

- Time to approval for new programs/courses
- # of interdisciplinary courses and courses collaboratively taught
- # of new interdisciplinary and collaborative academic programs and micro-credentials
- # of international partnership programs

Research

- # of collaborative and partnership grants
- # of interdisciplinary grants
- # grants related to reconciliation and EDI

Financial

- Proportion of overall budget to academy writ large
- Proportion of overall budget to administration

Philanthropy

- Alumni giving
- Business partnerships

External Community

- Alumni support for academic programs (e.g., WIL, practicums, internships in alumni owned businesses and not-for-profits)
- # and quality of connections to the City of Edmonton
- # external businesses/not-for-profits advising on academic programs
- Brand recognition metrics

Concluding Statement

The University of Alberta has and continues to go through a time of tremendous change. This change occurred in both the administrative and academic areas and was driven for the most part by external factors. The College Model provides a unique academic structure in Canada and could be a positive watershed moment for the university.

Given the amount of change, and the short 18-month period for this review, the successes that have been noted are quite remarkable, and range from the development of a new leadership culture, to enhanced efficiencies in academic administrative process, and in some cases coordination of strategic priorities. Each College is at a different time course in their establishment and development, and so a period of consolidation is required before the full value of the College Model is realized. Thus, this review and associated recommendations should be seen as a forward-looking document.

There is tremendous opportunity for the UA with the College Model – the success of the model will depend on the buy-in from the academic community.

Appendix A: Summary of Recommendations

- 1. Team-based culture:** *A team-based and collaborative culture has developed within the senior leadership structure of the university, and it needs to be carefully tended. There are many excellent role models in the senior team. Deans should deliberately and intentionally work on developing this type of culture with their department heads and administrative leaders in their faculties. Along with this new culture there should be a recognition that the academic mission, i.e., teaching and research, are not zero-sum games – when people work together and there is success, everyone benefits, including those not directly involved.*
- 2. Efficiencies – Academic Processes:** *All Colleges, in conjunction with their reporting Faculties, should continue to identify academic processes that can be moved to the College level. Process mapping should occur in advance, to ensure that academic decision making remains at the Faculty level. Best practices in creating these types of efficiencies should be shared between and within Colleges. Given the College Model, governance pathways should be established to approve new programs in a timely fashion.*
- 3. Efficiencies – Operational Processes:** *The coordination by Colleges of operational processes with Centres of Expertise (i.e., Shared Services, Finance, HR, VPRI) should continue to be expanded. Process mapping should occur in advance to ensure efficiencies are realized. A service culture should be encouraged and developed.*

NOTE: *these efficiency changes should not be viewed as centralization of services, but rather standardization of services.*

- 4. Strategic Priorities:** *Where possible, connections should continue to be made by Faculties within a College on strategic priorities. This will allow for innovation and should result in interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches. Strategic priorities should not just involve processes like enrolment and recruitment but should move into areas of research and education. Vice Provosts/College Deans and Associate Deans should eventually work together to identify collaborative opportunities between Colleges.*
- 5. University Research and ties to Tri-Council Agencies:** *While the College Model should lead to an increase in interdisciplinary, partnership, and large collaborative grants, there should be continued attention paid to standard disciplinary grants.*
- 6. Communication:** *Communication and the narrative about the College Model needs to be consistent, cohesive, and authentic and should include a solid rationale for the adoption of the Model, including the reasons noted above. There is a great story to tell in the changes that have been made. Exemplars of early successes need to be identified and amplified so that possibilities and potential for the new structure are recognized across campus. Regular communication, particular to staff and faculty, is important and needs to be coordinated across the university. Consider spokespeople outside of the leadership structure, so that people across the campus can see themselves and how they may be positively impacted.*

- 7. Value Add:** *The value proposition for the College Model should be clearly identified for all members of the University of Alberta – and specific strategies and metrics should be identified, implemented, measured and reported upon to ensure that the additional value of moving to this model is realized.*
- 8. Perception vs Reality and the Importance of Authentic Communication:** *The perceptions identified in the “Value Proposition of the College Model” section need to be addressed with authentic, honest communication. This does not appear to be a model that people can “wait out”, since many reasons for the model still exist, and people need to understand that is the case. Nothing in any written material pointed to decreasing departments or amalgamation of Faculties – but if this is in planning, it should be communicated directly.*
- 9. Reporting of Faculty Deans:** *Vice Provosts/College Deans must be seen as an extension of the Provost, with the authority of the provost behind them, rather than as another type of Dean, particularly since Colleges are not academic units. Consideration could be given to renaming this position Vice Provost College (and Associate Deans of the College as Associate Vice Provosts). This would help with the external perception of the reporting lines. This is a unique structure in Canada, but frankly one that is long overdue. The role of the Provost has become almost unmanageable in Canadian institutions, and the University of Alberta is to be commended for the courage demonstrated with the restructure of the Provost’s Office. It is difficult to be first – and if successful, many are likely to follow with restructures of their own. It also should be noted that this is an excellent example of “power to”, rather than “power over”, which speaks volumes about the current leadership at the University.*
- 10. Consolidation:** *Time for consolidation of both restructures (SET and the College Model), while attending to critical feedback, is important. Continued regular metrics for the SET restructuring should be collected and reported on, including service times for key processes within the academy. Where response times are still high, immediate action should be undertaken to address issues. Updates should be provided on each College regularly, so that progress can be mapped. Another review of the College Model should be completed in 18-24 months to determine whether consolidation has occurred, and benefits of the Model are seen in the academy.*
- 11. Business of the University:** *It is important that everyone at the university understand that the business of the university is the academy writ large (i.e., teaching and learning). It is not finance, HR, risk management, facilities, or other issues-based portfolios. All of these portfolios are important for the efficient and effective running of the university and provide critical support for the academic mission – and they must be balanced with the operations and needs of the academy. Education in some critical support positions and portfolios is required.*
- 12. Budget Model for Colleges:** *Rather than tax/levy faculties to create the budget for each college, consider a base transfer from Faculties to establish each College budget. The “tax” was interpreted by many, particularly smaller faculties, to be unfair. Consider a more transparent*

process for determining the basis for the base transfer. Further, develop a flexible fund to be used at the Provost's discretion, to ensure University of Alberta is able to capitalize on opportunities that occur within year.

13. Culture: *Culture does not happen by accident – deliberate and intentional action needs to be taken to shape positive culture. As an important first step, an employee engagement survey (EES) should be conducted to establish a baseline. Senior leaders should identify critical action steps from the results of the EES and commit to action. Individual units should receive their specific results and be held accountable for developing and implementing plans to address critical issues. The EES should be repeated on a 2-to-3-year cycle to determine whether forward progress is being made.*

14. Trust Gap: *Re-building trust within the faculty and staff will be an important piece of building a positive culture. This will take time, but will involve active listening, authentic consultation (i.e., that feedback provided in a consultation has a legitimate chance to be incorporated into a proposal going through governance, while recognizing that choices must be made on opposing points of view), and action when action has been promised. Issues also must be acknowledged before action can be taken.*

People need to feel valued for the work they are doing. The development of local, Faculty, College, and University-wide recognition programs should be undertaken, allowing for a range of formal recognition opportunities. Leaders should take an active and intentional role in informally recognizing people for the work they are doing.

15. Retention Strategy: *The university should track faculty member departures, and career timing of those departures. If there is a pattern of departures post tenure or just prior to tenure, a retention strategy for mid-career academics should be developed and put in place immediately. The retention strategy currently in place for senior academics should be reviewed and adjusted, if necessary.*

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